

Fresher/Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

Full Name: Fundamentals of Literary Theory

Short Name: Literary Theory

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Prof. Sam Slote (slotes@tcd.ie) and Dr Björn Quiring (QUIRINGB@tcd.ie)

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: MT

Year JF/SF/JS/SS: SF

Lecture and seminar

Module Content: Theories of literature deal with basic issues involving the study of narratives, poems and plays. They try to answer questions such as: what is literature? What are people doing when they write or read literary texts? Is there a social function of literature? And what is the task of a literary scholar? These questions are complex and they are connected with even more fundamental questions, such as: what is language and what is its place in society and in the individual? For this reason, literary theory has become a large, intricate terrain that beginners often find difficult to navigate. This module aims to provide the students with the basic conceptual tools that will enable them to engage with theoretical texts.

Learning Outcomes:

- Be familiar with some of the dominant schools of literary theory, from the late 19th century to today.
- Be able to consider and apply different theoretical approaches when analyzing literary works.
- Be familiar with the different debates regarding the role and value of literature in broader cultural contexts.
- Be prepared to engage in the practice of interpreting texts and contexts at an advanced level.

Learning Aims:

- ...consider the various theoretical approaches to reading and analyzing literature
- ...examine the conditions of literary theory in the 20th and 21st centuries
- ...take account of the impact of technological, cultural, economic change on the evolution of literary theories.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1 essay +10 weekly tasks
- Name/Type of Component(s): End-of-term exam + weekly tasks
- Word Count of Component(s): 2000–3000 words for exam + variable number for weekly tasks
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 75% + 25% (2.5% per weekly component)

Preliminary Reading List:

Week 1 (BQ/SS)

Introduction (The pre-20th-century history of literary criticism: Aristotle; rhetoric, poetics, exegesis/hermeneutics, liberal tradition)

Week 2 (SS)

New Criticism; Russian Formalism, Roman Jakobson, Vladimir Propp
Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique"; Roman Jakobson, "What is Poetry?" (excerpts);
"Linguistics and Poetics" (excerpts).

Week 3 (SS)

Saussure and his disciples (Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Genette)
Ferdinand de Saussure, Excerpts from the *Course in General Linguistics*, part 1 and 2.

Week 4 (BQ)

Speech act theory (Austin), media theory (McLuhan, Kittler)
John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, chapter 1; Friedrich Kittler,
"Gramophone, Film, Typewriter".

Week 5 (BQ)

Freud and his disciples (Lacan)
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, chapter 5 and 6 (excerpts); Jacques
Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter" (excerpts).

Week 6 (BQ)

Marx and the consequences (Lukács, Gramsci, Voloshinov, Jameson)
Karl Marx, *Capital* (excerpts); Valentin Voloshinov/Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxism and the
Philosophy of Language*, chapter 1.

Week 7

Reading Week

Week 8 (SS)

Nietzsche and the consequences (Foucault, New Historicism)
Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense"; Michel Foucault,
"What is an Author?"

Week 9 (SS)

Deconstruction (Derrida, de Man)
Jacques Derrida, "This Dangerous Supplement" (chapter 2.2 of *Grammatology*).

Week 10 (BQ)

Frankfurt School (Benjamin, Adorno, **Arendt**) and School of Konstanz (Jauß, Iser)
Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (excerpts), "The Storyteller" (excerpts),
"On the Concept of History" (excerpts); Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process".

Week 11 (SS)

Gender Theory (Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva, Butler, **Xenofeminism**)
Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman* (excerpts); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*,
chapter 1.

Week 12 (BQ)

Geophilosophy/Ecocriticism/current trends (Deleuze/Guattari, Whitehead et al.)
Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, "The Geology of Morals" (chapter 3 of *A Thousand Plateaus*;
excerpts); "Postulates of Linguistics" (chapter 4 of *A Thousand Plateaus*;
excerpts).

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.